

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
FLOOR STATEMENT ON DRILLING RULE
June 29, 2006

Mr. Chairman:

The way the House is handling off-shore oil drilling today pretty much defines “travesty.”

For the first time in more than a generation, we are going to vote on opening the entire coastline of the United States to oil and natural gas drilling. You’d think that would be considered a rather major matter that requires some thoughtful discussion. But that’s not how we’re handling it.

Instead, we are going to debate legislation that is being rushed through the House even though we are not up against any deadline.

The base bill we’re discussing and the report on it, which includes the cost estimate, were not filed until Monday. Once folks got a look at the text and the cost estimate, opposition pressure mounted, so the bill needed to be rewritten, and that rewriting continued well into the night last evening.

So the rule makes in order a manager’s amendment that includes massive changes in the bill that no one was able to see until daybreak today.

Is this a process we can be proud of? It seems all one has to do around here is use the word “oil” for the sanctity of the democratic process to simply slip away. The process we’re using today gives new meaning to the phrase “oil slick.”

Now, some may say, “Oh, come on, people know whether they’re for or against off-shore drilling. We don’t need a lot of time.”

Well, this bill doesn't just allow off-shore drilling. It changes all the rules on approving oil drilling in areas where it's allowed. It changes all the maps for state marine boundaries. Did you know that? Probably not, because the new maps aren't publicly available. It changes all the ways that royalty funds are distributed. It gives royalty breaks to oil companies. It's a complex, sweeping 147-page bill with many unprecedented provisions that most Members know nothing about.

And one might suggest that that's on purpose. When we point out these troubling provisions, the sponsors of the bill don't defend them, they try to deny that they're there. The remedy is to read the bill, but we're not giving anyone time to do that.

Did you know, for example, that under this bill, if the Secretary of the Interior opposes some future law because it limits drilling in any way, the Secretary can cut off all aid to states to try to get them to see the law his way? That's an unusual idea, to say the least. Do people support giving the Secretary authority to threaten Congress? Maybe we should discuss that.

Did you know that the bill subordinates every other use of coastal waters to oil drilling, blocking any effort to use waters in a way that could ever limit drilling in any way? That's what the bill says; it blocks any actions ever that could interfere with drilling.

If this bill ever becomes law, your constituents will be up in arms about just about every provision because the law gives oil interests the ability to trample everyone else's rights.

This is a bad bill that we should not be considering today.